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SUBJECT: PRT ANBAR: ANBAR VOTER REGISTRATION ECLIPSES 2005
VOTER TURNOUT

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2140
[1](#)B. EMBASSY BAGHDAD CLASSIFIED O/I APRIL 18

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor John Fox for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is a PRT Anbar reporting cable.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Summary: Anbar Governate Electoral Office (GEO) Director Khalid Rijab Abdul-Razak told the PRT that more than 46,600 Anbaris have verified their names on the list of the Province's pre-registered voters. At six percent of eligible voters, this is a significant improvement over the January 2005 provincial elections, when only two percent of Anbaris took part in elections. However, according to the GEO, younger Anbaris who turned 18 after the 2005 elections do not appear to be registering in large numbers. Based on the Saddam-era Public Distribution System (PDS), the voter pre-registration system is a "passive" voter registration system that ensures the majority of Anbaris who are eligible to vote will be registered on election day. Most Anbaris who have checked the list and verified they are registered have done so by phoning in to a special voter registration phone center. Some 40,000 posters and a similar number of pamphlets produced by the Independent High Electoral Committee have been distributed throughout Anbar, Khalid told us. The Anbar GEO has also worked closely with religious leaders to disseminate voter registration information throughout Anbar's far-flung communities. IHEC appears to have made a concerted effort to educate Anbaris and urge them to register or verify their names on the passive registration list. Whatever the final number of Anbaris who register to vote or verify they are already registered is, the passive registration system, which includes the names of about 660,000 Anbari who are "pre-registered," means that the majority of Anbaris will be able to vote come election day if they choose. End Summary.

Passive Registration -----

[1](#)3. (SBU) As of July 31, more than 46,600 Anbaris have verified that their names are on the list of some 660,000 pre-registered voters eligible to participate in provincial elections, expected to take place later this year or sometime in 2009, according to Anbar Governate Electoral Office (GEO) Director Khalid Rijab Abdul-Razak. This represents nearly six percent of the estimated 730,500 Anbaris who are eligible to vote, Khalid told us (Note: the 730,500 figure is an estimate of eligible Anbari voters from the 2005 provincial elections, out of an overall estimated population of about 1.3 million. End Note.). Halfway through the 30-day voter registration/verification period, about 4,000-plus Anbaris a day are now showing up at the province's Voter Registration Centers (VRCs) or phoning in to a widely-advertised number to check a central database and verify they are registered. Voter registration and verification began July 15 and is scheduled to end August 14.

[1](#)4. (SBU) GEO Director Khalid told us he had hoped that at

least 20 percent of Anbaris would check the list to ensure they are registered to vote. Though he is not sure if he will meet that goal, he said the number of Anbaris who have so far verified their registration is a significant improvement over the January 2005 provincial elections, when only two percent of Anbaris took part in elections.

15. (SBU) The voter pre-registration system is based on the Saddam-era Public Distribution System (PDS). The PDS was used to distribute government hand-outs of food and fuel and theoretically includes all Iraqis, but is in some cases incomplete. This "passive" voter registration system ensures that the majority of Anbaris who are eligible to vote will be registered on election day. But it also means that those who were omitted from the PDS list as a result of oversight, as well as many of those who were not yet 18 years old before the January 2005 election, will only be able to vote if they go to one of the 29 registration centers in the province and add their name.

Anbari Youth Not Registering

16. (SBU) Anbar GEO staff had expected that perhaps thousands of Anbaris) especially those who turned 18 after the 2005 elections) would check the list of pre-registered voters, learn that their names were not on the list, and subsequently register to vote. Instead, Khalid told us that very few young Anbaris are registering. "We are not reaching younger Anbari voters," Khalid told us. GEO staffers plan a number of outreach efforts in Ramadi and Fallujah during the first week of August, aimed at younger voters. But with university

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students on their summer break, such outreach will be difficult, he said.

Dial "7777"

17. (SBU) Khalid said most of the more than 46,600 Anbaris who have checked the list and verified they are registered have done so by phoning in. Posters plastered throughout many of Anbar's main cities and towns urge callers to press "7777" to reach an operator who can verify they are registered to vote. In addition, waves of text messages have swept through mobile phones urging Anbaris to call in: "Register to vote! Hurry up and call 7777 for free, to insure your name is on the voter registration list," reads one such message. GEO staff initially tested the 7777 number several times, which is linked to a Baghdad-based call center, and found that operators were sometimes making mistakes, telling people they were registered when they were not. Khalid told us he informed IHEC officials in Baghdad, and subsequent test calls to the 7777 number showed that operators were more accurate.

Posters, Pamphlets, and Imams

18. (SBU) Some 40,000 posters and a like number of pamphlets, approved and provided by IHEC, have been distributed throughout Anbar, Khalid told us. Many of these are designed to urge women to vote. Additionally, the Iraqi Police (IP) have been handing out pamphlets at checkpoints after they search vehicles or question hundreds of drivers per day, Khalid said. Voter registration awareness posters are clearly visible along the main roads in Ramadi. According to Khalid, distribution of voter registration literature has been more concentrated in eastern Anbar, particularly in the more populated cities of Ramadi and Fallujah. While the literature has made its way to the more remote western desert community of Rutbah, as well as the northwestern cities of Al Qa'im, Anah and Hadithah, distribution in these areas has not been as aggressive, Khalid told us.

¶9. (SBU) In response, and with the GEO,s approval, the PRT has handed over 1,200 voter registration awareness posters and 3,000 pamphlets) designed and approved by IHEC) to an Anbar-based NGO umbrella organization, which has agreed to mobilize 12 Anbar NGOs to distribute the literature primarily in western and northwestern Anbar. The posters were printed locally using PRT Quick Response Funds (QRF), and are part of a PRT program to supplement the GEO,s voter registration campaign.

¶10. (SBU) The Anbar GEO has also worked closely with religious leaders to disseminate voter registration information throughout Anbar,s far-flung communities. This includes a Fatwah from the Anbar Sunni Endowment,s senior theologian, Dr. Thamir Al-Assafi, proclaiming people should register and vote. They have also coordinated with Anbar Sunni Endowment leader Abdullah Jallal al-Faraj to get the same message out to the public through the Friday evening mosque sermons) which reach as many as 500,000 Anbaris a week (ref A).

Registration Center Security

¶11. (C) Khalid told us he was pleased with security arrangements at the registration centers. When the centers first opened July 15, some had only a few police guarding VRC staff as well as the building itself. Others were guarded with a more robust force of 20 or more police. "It depended on the community and how well-informed the local police chief was," Khalid said. The Anbar GEO staff includes a police captain who acts as a liaison to Anbar Provincial Chief of Police Major General Tariq Yusif Muhammad al-Thiyabi. Through this mechanism, initial concerns that some of the registration centers did not have adequate security personnel were addressed, Khalid told us. He said that he has not heard any reports of threats or intimidation toward Anbaris registering to vote. He added, however, that he has received several threats from unknown people on his cell phone, and has subsequently changed his number.

Minor Problems with Police, Army

¶12. (SBU) Likewise, Khalid attributed poor initial communication to a few cases of uncooperative behavior by some local officials. In Saqlawiyah, located between Ramadi and Fallujah, police removed the sign in front of the Voter Registration Center. Khalid told us he was not sure why this was done, but added that the problem was quickly resolved

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when higher police authorities intervened. The sign was re-erected at the registration center, he said. In Hit, located northwest of Ramadi, an Iraqi Army officer reportedly made public statements that elections were not needed in that town. Again, GEO staff contacted military authorities and the anti-election public statements were stopped, Khalid told us. He described these incidents as minor and not part of a coordinated effort to hinder elections.

Voting Registration Centers

¶13. (SBU) The Anbar GEO had originally identified 28 voting registration centers (VRCs) to be distributed throughout the province. An additional center was added shortly before registration began in the remote southern community of Nukhayb, which straddles the main highway between Karbala and the Saudi Arabia border, making a total of 29 VRCs in Anbar. Khalid told us he felt that the entire province is adequately covered by VRCs. He added that each VRC includes a trained staff of 13. Among the staff are six personnel who interact with potential voters and check their names against an alphabetized version of the PDS list.

Comment

¶14. (SBU) The Anbar GEO and IHEC appear to have made a concerted effort to educate Anbaris and urge them to register or verify their names on the passive registration list. Whatever is the final number of Anbaris who register to vote or verify they are already registered, the passive registration system, which includes the names of about 660,000 Anbari who are "pre-registered," means that the majority of Anbaris will be able to vote come election day if they choose. Most Anbari leaders with whom we have spoken, including members of the ruling Iraqi Islamic Party and the opposition Mutammar Sahwa al Iraq (MSI), or Iraq Awakening Conference, believe voter turnout will be substantial.

¶15. (SBU) This is in contrast to the January 2005 provincial elections, which took place at the height of the Sunni insurgency and against the backdrop of a Sunni election boycott. Then, only two percent of Anbar's estimated eligible voters cast a ballot. "This election will be very different," opposition MSI leader Sheikh Ahmad Abu Risha told us recently. "Anbaris know they need to vote this time." GEO Khalid attributed the relatively low voter registration/verification turnout to two things: Complacency to register because many Anbaris believe they are already on the PDS list; and an absence of pre-election excitement because no actual election date has been announced. He believes voter enthusiasm will pick up as a concrete election date nears. End Comment.
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